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A Tragedy in a New York Flat.

A Dramatic Episode in Two Scenes.



By SADAKICHI HARTMANN.

*Written in a New York Flat, '95-'96,
on nothing a week.*

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AUTHOR'S EDITION, 1896.

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1896.

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DEDICATED
TO THE TRINITY OF MY ARTISTIC FAITH,
BERLIOZ, STEINLEN, WHITMAN.

PERSONS REPRESENTED.

GEORGE HATCHING (age 28), of tall and vigorous build; his face full of freckles; the purple of dissipation under his eyes. His thin brown hair is combed down on both sides, which gives him an insolent appearance. Carelessly but well dressed.

CHARLES FISHER (age 40), of heavy build, very awkward, a full round face with a reddish beard, bad teeth, his voice of guttural harshness. Despite these deficiencies he has something agreeable and sympathetic about him; one feels that he has soul depth beneath his rough surface.

KATHLEEN, Fisher's wife (age 25), of slim figure, breasts and hips well developed. Her features symmetrical, only the mouth with its full protruding lips disturbs; round its corners wrinkles are already perceptible. She wears a red wrapper with a few buttons torn off.

SCENE I.

Kitchen of a flat. Walls stained green. The range is lit. In the rear corner to the right a window opening on a gray wall. From time to time two small, timid spots of sunshine appear on the floor. To the left two doors, one to the stairway, the second to the other rooms.

Kathleen (preparing luncheon): I wonder whether we'll rent our room. I did not fancy any of the men who looked at it—glad that none of them took it. (*Knocks.*) Probably somebody else, or a beggar. (*Opens door to corridor.*)

George (outside): Is Mr. Fisher at home?

Kathleen (staring at him, stammering): My husband—is at work in the carpenter shop, right across the way. Can I—perhaps—(*screaming*)—for heaven's sake—you, George!—what do you want here?

George (entering, reproachful): You don't seem to be very pleased to see me back again, Kathleen,—well, I should have known it.

Silence. Both search for words.

George (toying nervously with his hat): I am only a few days in town again—looked for you in the old haunts—there they told me—that you married a month ago.

Kathleen: If you know it, why do you not leave me alone?

George: I did not believe that you could forget me so soon; I wanted (*grinning*) to convince myself.

Kathleen (indignant): Don't waste any words. Who left me a year ago without saying good-bye? Did you ever write to me? Not once. Surely you can not blame me for—

George (scornful): For consoling yourself and taking another one; of course not, my dear. But that I went away to work, to save some money, and then to come back and marry you, you never thought of that, did you?

Silence.

Kathleen (rapidly murmuring to herself): Who would have thought of that when Charles—he wooed so seriously, blushing all over—asked if I wanted to go as his wife through life. I did not refuse; a little home is better than uncertainties. George, I thought, might act like others. But, strange, at the wedding, at the minister's house, when I had to say the "Yes," I thought of George—but then the dinner, the wine, the congratulations and Charles so kind—I felt happy; yet is it love, when I cook for him, talk with him, even at night, even at night?

George (subdued): Tell me only one thing, Kate, do you really love him—as much as you did me? For if you do—I won't bother you any more; I have nothing more to do in this world.

Kathleen (aside, in a sudden outburst): Ah, Georgie!—No—no—matter how it stands, Georgie, we two can have nothing more to do with each other. I respect my husband, and that's the principal thing in married life, the minister said so; and before God and all others I am his wife.

George (seizing her hand): But you do not love him, you do not love him, because you still love me. The minister overlooked that. You could sell your body, not your soul. Deny it, if you can.

Kathleen (imploring): George, you will make us all unhappy—be reasonable and go.

George (passionate): Deny that you still love me—deny it and I leave at once, at once.

Kathleen (bursts into tears and sinks down upon a chair).

George: Have we two not been husband and wife before the minister had anything to do with the case? or don't you remember when we—(coughs).

Kathleen (stares at the floor, her bosom heaves).

George (looks at her licentiously): Katie, the past gives me the first right on you, and I'll never give it up, because I love you as much as ever.

Kathleen (whispering): I have never forgotten you—but now it is too late—it can not be, it would be wrong.

George (tries to kiss her; Kathleen strains her head backwards and his head falls on her bosom).

Kathleen (jumps up with a scream, struggling to free herself).

George (heavily breathing, tries to force her lips to his.)

Kathleen (groaning): Leave me. If he came—I would die of shame—be reasonable, Georgie, go, go! (*tries to seize something to defend herself*).

George (letting her go): It's true—we are not safe in here—but we'll talk of it again, for I want you, and if I had to kill him—(*picks up his hat and turns to exit*).

Kathleen: George, have pity with me. Will you spoil everything? you can't change it now.

George (grinning, makes a gesture of contempt, with hypnotic emphasis): If you have still a spark of feeling left for me, you know what you have to do for me, later on. (*Exits.*)

Kathleen (takes a deep breath, arranges her wrapper and brushes her hair back with her right hand): — Oh, I am so frightened—it came too sudden. (*Holds herself on a chair.*) Why did he not stay away! Why does he step now between me and Charles! I wish he had died! (*Puts the luncheon on the table.*) What shall I do? How, how avert—Oh, mother of God, help me, help me! (*Leaning against the table a breeze is wafted through the room; she closes her eyes with lassitude.*) No, I can't think of anything.—Tell everything to Charles, that would be best, he would protect me—but then he had to know all, would lose his faith in me, despise me. (*At the window.*) The jewess is beating her children again. Mrs. Thompson has already her washing on the lines; how white it is! (*The whistles of factories at noon are heard.*) Something must be done. I must be strong (*with a painful smile*), resist his temptation—for he will come again; he will come again.

Charles (enters, kisses her, puts two oranges on the table): Got them on the corner for you. (*Takes off his overcoat, washes his hands, and sits down at the table.*)

Kathleen (looks at him with bad conscience): You don't seem to be in good humor to-day; you are so quiet.

Charles (beginning to eat): Not at all; not at all. Nothing is the matter with me, as long as you love me. (*Stretches his hands across the table.*) Do you know, I have had good luck. As I stepped in just now, I met a young fellow and rented our room to

him. He seems to be a decent sort of a chap; he paid two weeks in advance, he said he liked it so well. A good soup! (*Smacks his lips.*) You know how to do it. Yes; some folks make more than we carpenters do.

Kathleen: What is his name?

Charles: He has put it down on a card for me. There it is. George H-a-t-c-h-i-n-g-s, Hatchings.

Kathleen (*Almost fainting, aside*): Is it possible! He dares to go as far as that. The past will revenge itself. The villain; he knows only too well what he is doing—oh if I could only escape—

Charles (*looking up, anxiously*): Why, what is the matter, Kate?

Kathleen: Oh, nothing. It's gone. Bending over the stove, you know, the blood went into my head.

Charles: Yes, it is getting warm already. You must be careful, Kate.

Kathleen: Yes, somebody was here shortly before you came in; if he's to be our lodger, I must say, he didn't please me particularly. Yet just as you think—you know these things better.

Charles: There is nothing wrong about him, I assure you. I saw it at once; why, he even paid two weeks' rent in advance (*laughs, satisfied, as he shows the money*). The room is fixed, isn't it? He wants to move in at once.

Kathleen (*repeats mechanically with a forced smile*): There is nothing wrong about him.

Charles (*lights his pipe*): Well, I have to be off again. Awfully busy to-day. Have to finish a job by three. Good bye, Kate.

Kathleen (*aside*): How kind he is. (*Embraces him with a tinge of tenderness.*)

Charles (*glides with his hands caressingly over her breast and hips*): Katie, you only love me—don't you—only me? (*Kisses her and exit.*)

Kathleen: I am glad that he is gone, the good old man. He trusts me. But what shall I do with George. He may be here at any moment. I must speak to him—first get calm—so—and then greet him friendly but firm, explain to him why it can not be. Yes, that's what I am going to do. He will be reasonable; at least I pray to God that he will be.

George (enters): Here I am back again. You expected me?

Kathleen (giving him her hand): Georgie, let us—

George: Oh, you have become more reasonable; I thought you would. (*His voice and action reveal that hypnotic magnetism which certain men possess when bent on seduction.*)

Kathleen: No—

George: Let us sit down. (*Sits down*). I have much to tell you,

Kathleen: No—I wanted—I beg of you—do not come here—do not lead me into temptation by your presence.

George (fondles her reluctant hand): Oh, come, we two are used to it, aren't we?

Kathleen: Oh, if only somebody would come!

George: Kate, do you still remember the first time I called for you to go to the Park with me? You had your brown dress on, and I presented you with some flowers; how nice they smelt. We walked hand in hand. And do you remember how we laid down in the grass; we could see the blue sky through the treetops.

Kathleen (gasps for breath to speak).

George: And all the beautiful words we said to each other. And then when it grew dark we sought for a lonesome bench; it grew so dark that I could draw you on my lap (*draws her on his lap*), and then—you leaned your head against my shoulder—and—(*he embraces and kisses her, and kisses her more and more greedily as the curtain drops*).

SCENE II.

THE SAME SCENERY. Ten months later. Winter. Evening.

Kathleen (kneeling over a big basket in which her two weeks' old child is lying): Ah, my poor little darling, I wish we both were dead. I wonder how everything went well until now. Why does he not leave, the brute, as he is tired of me. He will stay here as long as he gets free board and can spend his

money in drink. Oh, I hate all men!—You, little man, only two weeks old and already obliged to take medicine. How he looks at me. Just as if he accused me of all the guilt and sin through which he was born.

Charles (enters softly, takes off his overcoat, and comes on tiptoes to the basket): How is the little fellow? I have thought of him all day.

Kathleen (weary): Rest is the principal thing—says the doctor—much rest—otherwise he won't live.

Charles: Ah!—He isn't in, is he? He always makes so much noise. He is after all a disagreeable fellow—no conscience. We must get rid of him; the sooner the better. The idea of telling me last Saturday when he was drunk, that nobody could know for certain whether he was the father of his own children—I know. If the child dies, I'll lose my wits. How God can do—ah, it is just as if he had to do penance for having come into this world.

Kathleen (nodding, aside): The sin of the fathers shall descend on their children. It is well if he sleeps—that strengthens him.

Sombody is heard going through the corridor with great noise.

Charles (angry): The beast—how he goes on when he is drunk, just as if he were alone in the world—and we had no sick baby. I'll tell him.

Kathleen: Don't; you know how rough he is.

(Curses, and a chair tumbling down are heard).

Charles (opening door to flat rooms): Can't you behave like a decent person. It is very mean of you, to say the least, knowing how sick our child is.

George (enters; hat pressed into his forehead, one of his boots half off, stares at Charles, then pulls off his boot and hurls it back into his room): What do I care for that bastard?—that is my room in there—and there I can do what I d— please; do you understand me, you, you—

Charles: And I tell you once for all that I won't stand such noise in my flat, and you have no right to call my child a bastard, you drunken—

George (makes a few steps forwards, but staggers against the wall): Don't brag too much—about that child—otherwise I could say something—that wouldn't be (*grinning*) quite agreeable to you.

Kathleen (aside to George): Georgie!

Charles (with a sudden suspicion): What do you mean to say? Go on; tell what you know.

Kathleen (aside): It has come. It had to come.

Charles (seizes the drunkard by his shirt collar): Do I perhaps not know if I am the father of my child? you—

George (enraged): No; you don't know it—for I am just as much his father—

Kathleen: It is a lie!

George: —as you—I had your Kate long before you ever dreamt of her.

Charles (staggering, then raising a chair to strike): That's an infamous lie—an infamous lie—I'll knock your brains out for it.

Kathleen (throws herself into his arms).

George (laughs hoarsely, draws his hand over his mouth, and continues in gurgling tones): Ask her herself—if you don't believe me—we two have been—quite intimate with each other—quite intimate—and I was the first one—and therefore have more right—more right (*falls to the floor*).

Charles (gasping for breath, looking wildly at Kathleen.)

Kathleen (sobbing desperately): I couldn't help it. Spirits of the past! Oh, Charles, don't look so terrible; for God's sake!

Charles (his eyes protrude out of their sockets, a convulsive tremor shakes his body; he throws himself upon the basket, seizes the child and hurls it at Kathleen's feet): Take it back. I don't want to own it. It is not of my own flesh and blood. You deceived me with my own flesh and blood.

Kathleen (bends over the child): Charles, you have killed him!

Charles (stares at the child, recognizes what crime he has committed; groaning and pressing both hands to his temples, he rushes out of the room).

George (is heard snoring loudly as the curtain drops).

PREVIOUS WORKS OF THE AUTHOR.



Essays ('89-'91) in "*The Theatre*," New York, published by DESHLER WELCH.

"*Christ*," a Dramatic Poem in three acts, published in Boston, '93. Out of print. Copies valued at \$5.00.

"*The Art Critic*," Nov., '93, Jan'y and March, '94. A few bound copies of the three numbers for sale at \$3.00

"*Conversations with Walt. Whitman*," published by E. P. COBY & Co., New York, '95. Price, 50 Cents. For sale at Brentano's.



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